DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 232 224 CS 504 260

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TITLE Simulation as a Method of Teaching Communication for Multinational Corporations.
PUB DATE May 83
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Dallas, TX, May 26-30, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Business Skills; *Communication Problems; Communication Skills; *Cross Cultural Training; *Cultural Awareness; *Intercultural Communication; Interpersonal Communication; *Management Development; Multicultural Education; Organizations (Groups); *Simulation; Training Methods

ABSTRACT

Interpersonal simulations may be used as a module in cultural awareness programs to provide realistic environments in which students, supervisors, and managers may practice communication skills that are effective in multicultural environments. To conduct and implement a cross-cultural simulation, facilitators should proceed through four stages: preparation, introduction, operation and postsimulation disscusion-critique. To prepare for the simulation, facilitators must first define the learning objectives that are obtainable and observable. Second, the simulation must be integrated with other training materials used in the course. Third, a pilot simulation should be run to discover the dynamics of the exercise. After participants have been given culture-general and culture-specific information and have been permitted to practice universal communication skills, the facilitator should introduce the simulation to them. Dyads are then formed, with one participant serving as the supervisor and the other as the employee. It should be explained to the supervisors that they must use culture-specific information and effective communication skills to help the employee solve his or her problem. Employees should be instructed to resist giving any new information until the supervisor has developed a supportive climate for communication through some culture-specific and some universal communication techniques. Afterwards, time is spent processing or discussing what happened. If the simulations are effective, participants usually leave the session talking about how they are going to change their work behavior. (HOD)

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SIMULATION AS A METHOD OF TEACHING COMMUNICATION FOR MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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International Communication Association
33rd Annual Conference
Dallas, Texas

May 26-30,1983

CS 504260

SIMULATION AS A METHOD OF TEACHING COMMUNICATION FOR MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

Simulations are a popular and widely-used method of teaching and training people in the development of various skills. Discoveries about aircraft in flight have been made in wind tunnels. Astronauts train for space flight through simulations. Airplane pilots and automobile drivers learn on simulators. Law students experience trial conditions through moot courts. First-aid personnel practice cardio-pulmonary rescusitation on inflatable dummies. Security and safety personnel train to deal with various hazards and obstacles through fire drills, lifeboat drills, air raid drills and other forms of simulation.

Simulations have also been used widely in management training. Machine simulations and interpersonal simulations have given trainees an idea of what to expect and how to react to probable leadership situations.

Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how interpersonal simulations may be used as a module in cultural awareness programs to provide realistic environments in which students, supervisors and managers may practice communication skills that are effective in multicultural environments.

WHAT IS A SIMULATION?

Jandt (1974) defines a simulation as "a representation of a model of some external reality through which the players interact in much the same way they would in reality. . . [It] is an operating model through which process and change may be observed" (p. 79).

In an interpersonal simulation, participants are provided with role descriptions, prescriptions and proscriptions; then the model is allowed to operate. A distinctive feature that separates simulations from others models is that, as the participants interact, various changes in behavior may be predicted and observed (Verba, 1964, p. 491).

Participants are assigned familiar roles to play in order to reduce distortions that might naturally occur with unfamiliar roles. When unfamiliar roles are required, the simulation should be so structured that the constraints and responsibilities of those roles are imposed by the model. Participants are often subject to rewards, strict communication channels, and restrictions on the types of information that they may transmit (Hermann, 1967). Simulations should, however, be as abstract as possible while still being predictive (Emshoff and Sisson, 1970). In simulations, there is little "second-guessing" about personalities or positions within the given roles. Participants are given goals to orient their behavior, resources to help them reach their goals, and expected consequences of their behavior (Greenblat and Duke, 1981).

Benefits of simulations

Greenblat and Duke (1981) point out the many benefits from using simulations. Simulations

- involve all trainees;
- heighten trainees' motivation and interest;
- make learning enjoyable;
- encourage participants' articulation about theories and principles;
- provide referents for concepts;
- train participants in skills to be used later;
- promote curiosity and inquiry;
- involve less money, less risk and less time;
- provide perspective, empathy, insight;
- change classroom structure; and more.

NEED FOR CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING

One of the areas where simulations can serve as a natural teaching and learning tool is in the area of cultural awareness training. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that business environments need this training.

Multinational corporations have increased in size and number in various parts of the world in the past thirty years. In the twenty-five year period between 1953 and 1978, sales abroad by United States firms from exports and direct investments increased from about $33 billion to over $485 billion. The current expansion of foreign companies in the United States also parallels the rapid growth of United States companies abroad. Harris and Moran (1979) report that at least two-million Americans now work within the U.S. borders for foreign employers; the number appears to be increasing.

Within many major corporations in the U.S., statistics indicate that personnel forces are largely multicultural. At one well-known electronics corporation, foreign-born employees comprise sixty percent of the production work force. Another company claims that ninety-nine percent of its total production population is foreign-born (Almazol, 1982). With the influx of refugees and foreign students, we can expect this trend to continue.

Ricks et al. (1974) and Ricks (1983) have categorized by organizational function (i.e., management, marketing, personnel, etc.) a rather substantial collection of blunders that major corporations have committed because they have not researched the cultures in which they were attempting to conduct business. Not only have these blunders resulted in the loss of millions, perhaps billions, of dollars, but they also have caused unnecessary embarrassment and strain on interpersonal and international relations.

Waxman (1977) surveyed 180 U.S. companies conducting business in Latin America. Of the 99 companies responding, 69 percent provided no cross-cultural training. When asked why, 37 percent answered that they had not previously considered the importance of cross-cultural training, 32 percent reported that they did not have enough time for cross-cultural training, 15 percent believed that the training was too expensive, and 10 percent said that they did not know where to get the resources. With a second sample, Waxman found that 77 percent

of the companies provided general cross-cultural training, 39 percent provided culture-specific training before employee departure, and 24 percent offered culture-specific training within the host culture.

There is clearly a need for cross-cultural sensitivity training programs. The training is often nonexistent or emphasizes the mastery of language with little or no attention given to skill development. Most companies hope that through frequent exposure and gradual language proficiency, business persons will begin to function effectively within the new culture.

Organizational cultural awareness programs

The purpose of cultural awareness programs is "to teach members of one culture ways of interacting effectively, with a minimum of misunderstanding, in another culture" (Brislin and Pedersen, 1976).

Downs (1975) lists four models for cross-cultural training programs:

1. The self-awareness model: sensitivity training or other training to accept oneself as a critical requisite to understanding people from other cultures;
2. The intellectual model: lectures and readings about other cultures;
3. The cultural awareness model: learning cross-cultural behavior and skills that transcend all cultural boundaries; and
4. The area simulation model: simulating future experiences in culture-specific situations.

These models represent various levels of training within comprehensive cultural awareness programs.

Stull and Baird (1981a) developed a cross-cultural training program for high-technology firms in which there are three levels:

> Level I: Cultural Awareness--General and Specific. Based on the hypothesis that cross-cultural sensitivity can be developed (Stull and Baird, 1980a), this phase of training involves participants in an assessment of their own attitudes and understanding about people from other cultures, an explanation of some of the differences in cultural norms, and a presentation of information about the importance of cross-cultural awareness in multinational environments. Participants learn about ethnocentrism, cultural relativism and other "general" information on culture; they are also provided with "specific" information on cultures important to the corporation.

Level II: Practicing Cultural Awareness Skills. Studies have concluded that there are universal communication skills (Ruben 1977). These skills allow one to interact in virtually any culture, creating an optimum communication climate, while minimizing defensiveness among the interactants.

Specifically, the universal communication skills are: showing personal respect, being nonjudgmental, being flexible, being spontaneous, using a problem orientation, and being empathic (Stull and Baird, 1981c).

At this level, participants are involved in active listening and information-getting exercises that are designed to encourage the use of communication techniques that increase the likelihood of a supportive climate.

Level III: Applying Skills to Specific Cultural Situations. Here, through interpersonal simulations, participants apply the skills learned in Level II to the culture-specific information learned in Level I. Participants are given specific role behaviors designed to demonstrate cultural sensitivity for a given culture. Their partners are instructed on how to behave if certain cultural norms are observed or violated.

So far, this paper has developed a rationale for the need for cultural awareness training. One of the most effective methodologies for promoting cultural learning is through simulation techniques.

Jandt (1974) suggests that simulations "may be one of the most appropriate research designs for the study of social conflict." Because interpersonal simulations are characterized by role playing, participant interaction, and decision making, they are most likely to allow for social conflict (pp. 81-82). Jandt interprets Burton's (1969) observation that "social conflict results from ineffective communication and that conflict resolution is a process of altering competitive and conflicting communication relationships into ones in which common values are being sought.

Various cross-cultural simulations have gained popularity over the years. Fiedler et al. (1971) developed a culture assimilator to prepare people to respond to culture-specific situations. The assimilator is a programmed learning experience in which participants read short cultural vignettes and select from a number of listed interpretations of what was culturally appropriate for that situation.

Stewart et al. (1973) created a contrast-American, culture-general simulation. Through role-playing, a U.S. national faces a person from a "composite"

culture holding contrasting values. This technique results in a heightened awareness of the participant's own culture and how it differs from others.

R. Garry Shirts developed a number of cross-cultural simulations, perhaps the best-known of which is Bafá Bafá. In Bafá Bafá, participants are divided into two dissimilar cultures and are required to interact with each other. Various verbal and nonverbal signals enhance or hinder participants in reaching certain objectives.

To give cross-cultural simulations a business perspective, Stull and Baird (1980a, 1980b, 1980c; also see Baird and Stull, 1980) developed a cross-cultural marketing simulation. In this simulation, participants are divided into five fictitious cultures paralleling various Asian, African and Latin American cultures. Participants take on prescribed role behaviors involving those components of culture in Terpstra's (1978) model: language, attitudes and values, religion, social organization, education, technology, political system, and legal system. Restricted by these cultural roles, participants represent business organizations from different cultures, interested in marketing goods or services to each other culture's organization. Participants adopt organizational roles, decide on products or services for each other culture, develop sales presentations, design product packages, create story boards, negotiate with other organizational leaders, and conduct other typical business that would go into the marketing of goods and services. Throughout this simulation, participants must consider the cultural implications and consequences of everything that they do. Designed primarily for extra-organizational communication, this simulation may be modified to run from a number of hours to an entire semester.

To develop participants' intra-organizational communication skills, Stull and Baird (1981a; also see Baird and Stull, 1981) prepared Developing Cultural Awareness for Hewlett-Packard. This multi-technique program culminates with a cross-cultural simulation. To present this simulation here, let us look at it

from the perspective of the model of how effective simulations are run, as outlined by Greenblat and Duke (1981).

RUNNING A CROSS-CULTURAL SIMULATION

Greenblatt and Duke define four stages that one should follow when planning and running simulations: preparation, introduction, operation, and post-simulation discussion-critique.

Preparing for the simulation

To increase the likelihood of a successful cross-cultural simulation (CCS), the facilitator should take a number of pre-simulation steps.

First, clearly define the learning objectives that are obtainable and observable. In this CCS, participants have the opportunity (1) to practice universal communication skills within the parameters of a culture-specific situation, and (2) to develop their understanding of culture-specific information.

Second, integrate the simulation with the other training materials used in the course. In this CCS, the simulation provides a model within which participants can apply the universal communication skills practiced within Level II to the culture-general and culture-specific information discussed in Level I.

Third, run a pilot simulation to discover the dynamics of the exercise. Not only has this CCS been pretested, but we also include as part of the Developing Cultural Awareness program with each company a pre-course validation of our culture-specific information. Selected members of those major cultures within a given corporation are assembled in a training room with the trainers and are briefed on the course and are asked to pre-test various training instruments and materials.

Next, prepare all training materials so that maximum ease in running the simulation is ensured. Be sure to plan for handouts, workbooks, assistants, etc. In this CCS, role sheets and culture-specific information are included in

the training workbooks; additional instructions (hidden agendas, etc.) are prepared and given out just before the interaction stage of the simulation.

Finally, find out if the training facility has adequate space and breakout rooms for the simulation. Plan for at least one breakout room for each role in the simulation (i.e. persons playing role A go here; role B go here, etc.).

Introducing the simulation

After participants have been given culture-general and culture specific information and have been permitted to practice universal communication skills, the facilitator should introduce the simulation to them.

First, explain that simulations are a widely-used, successful instructional technique that is common to supervisory and managerial training programs. Explain that skills may be practiced without many real life risks.

Second, explain the purpose of the cross-cultural simulation, the skills to be practiced, the culture-specific information, and the roles of the participants.

Third, form dyads--one partner as the supervisor and the other as the employee--and hand out role sheets like the following:

> Supervisor
>
> You are having some problems with Noblesa, one of our Filipino employees. Lately, you have noticed a real change in her work behavior. She started with you about four months ago and her work behavior was excellent. Lately, she has been missing a lot of work and when she is at work, she doesn't seem to be as concerned about the quality of her work. You have noticed that her work area has been particularly "messy." You have not had many conversations with her, but feel that you must talk to her at this time. How would you handle this situation?
>
> 1. What culture-specific information will you use in trying to deal with Noblesa in this situation?
> 2. Which specific cross-cultural skills will you use to deal with Noblesa?

You are Noblesa, the Filipino employee in this situation. You really enjoyed your job when you first started. In fact, you still like your work. Recently, you have been having some personal problems at home. Your husband has become very ill and you are very worried about him. This has placed a great deal of burden on you to take care of him and the rest of the family. Also, he will be off work indefinitely and you are beginning to feel the financial pressures.

In view of your understanding of the Filipino culture, how might you expect Noblesa to respond to the supervisor in this situation?

If the supervisor takes an approach that is supportive and non-judgmental with an emphasis on open questions, probes, and active listening, then begin to open up and respond. However, if the supervisor does not use such an approach and gets defensive and judgmental, then do not offer any new information.

In this situation, try both verbally and nonverbally to role-play the employee as closely as possible to your understanding of the Filipino culture.

Next, take all those playing the role of the supervisor into one breakout room and those playing the role of the employee into another. Explain to the supervisors that they must use culture-specific information (presented in Level I) and effective communication skills (presented in Level II) to help the employee solve her problem. Review some of this information with these participants. Be brief. By this time, you will have allowed the participants playing the role of the employee to have read their role sheets and will have instructed them to review the culture-specific information on the Filipino culture. Instruct them to resist giving any new information until the supervisor develops a supportive climate for communication through using some culture-specific and some universal communication techniques.

Finally, bring both groups back into their dyads. Explain that some initial confusion and nervousness are normal and that everything will fall into place once they get started. Keep your lecturing to a minimum. Be enthusiastic.

Operating the simulation

Once the actual cross-cultural simulation starts, the facilitator should take certain steps to keep it on track:

- remind participants occasionally of the rules of the cross-cultural simulation;
- help participants with unanticipated problems;
- announce time limits and, periodically, time remaining;
- keep participants involved;
- make observations for discussion;
- participate in the simulation when necessary; and
- keep the simulation moving.

If at any time the simulation starts to drag, the facilitator may wish to give further instructions or to move into the discussion-critique process.

Discussing the simulation

About one-third of the time allowed for the entire simulation portion of CCS is spent processing or discussing what happened.

First, allow participants to vent their feelings about the CCS. They may have experienced confusion, frustration or some other emotion. Ask, "How did the CCS make you feel?"

Next, examine the simulation systematically to see if it helped participants to achieve their objectives of (1) practicing skills and (2) understanding culture-specific information. Ask for suggested improvements.

Finally, ask participants to discuss how they might use this experience on the job. Ask, "Now that you have been throug this CCS, do you think that you will behave any differently on the job?" "What conclusions or generalizations might you make?"

VALIDITY OF SIMULATIONS

Participants usually leave training sessions talking about how they are going to change their behavior at work. One of the areas yet to be developed in Developing Cultural Awareness is a follow-up session to measure if, in fact, supervisor behavior is different after the seminar. That is, are they being (more) culturally sensitive?

In both Jandt (1974) and Greenblat and Duke (1981), trainers are given a caveat regarding the empirical validity of simulations. It is hoped that in

simulations action will lead to cognition and then to generalizations to other actions as it is applied. Early evidence indicates that the end result may come about without the middle one. Further research on the process is surely needed.

On a positive note, however, simulations seem to result in an awareness level about situations that might not be as easily studied if they are studied in more traditional, serious methods. They allow the researcher to measure situational responses that otherwise might not be as easily observed. They also allow the researcher to create situations in which he or she may manipulate variables more easily or replicate more easily.

The use of simulations requires some modifications of standard research methods. As for external validity, the experimenter must be satisfied that the simulation's operating model will produce outcomes under conditions similar to those to be found in reality. By using these techniques, though, both the oversimplicity of gaming laboratories and the overcomplexity of less-structured field studies may be overcome.

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